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Sen. Gurney Admits He Withheld Data

Tampa, Fla.

Former senator Elward J. Gurney testified at his bribery-conspiracy trial yesterday that he withheld information on wrongful political fund-raising because it would have destroyed him as a member of the Senate Watergate committee.

The 61-year-old Gurney, testifying for the second consecutive day in his own defense, said he learned in July, 1973, that funds were being solicited on his behalf from builders doing business with the Federal Housing Administration.

He said he wrote a letter to then-Attorney General Elliot Richardson telling what he knew of the fund raising. Then, Gurney said, he had second thoughts and ordered his administrative assistant, James Groot, to get the letter back and destroy it.

"There was a reason for getting it back, and that was my very unique position on the Watergate committee," said Gurney, a Republican who was one of former President Richard Nixon's staunchest defenders on the committee.

"My effectiveness on the Watergate committee would have been totally destroyed," and the letter would have been an embarrassment to the committee, the Senate, the Republican party and the administration, Gurney said.

He said he knew from experience that there are no political secrets in Washington, and that if he had permitted the letter to go through to Richardson, "it would be leaked to the press just like everything in this investigation has been leaked to the press."

The ex-senator and the three co-defendants are accused of getting special favors from the FHA for builders who contributed to a political slush fund for Gurney.

The man who allegedly fronted for Gurney in the fund-raising, Larry Williams, has testified that he collected \$400,000 on the senator's behalf.

Gurney said he first learned of Williams' activities in July, 1973, and that he wrote the letter to Richardson because he knew that he had a responsibility to report what was going on.

"I realized that wrongdoing had been done," Gurney said. "I was not involved in it, but although I had no part in this fund raising, I was beginning to get some information. After I began learning some of the details, obviously I had some responsibility."

United Press